

REMARKS

Claims 1 and 3-17 are pending in the application. Applicants note that the Examiner renumbered the claims to correspond with the original numbering.

Claims 1 and 3-17 have been rejected again by the Examiner in the final Office Action. Applicants request reconsideration of these rejections based upon the following comments.

Claim Rejections – 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claim 17 is rejected under the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. § 112 as being indefinite. Applicants respectfully request that the rejection should be withdrawn due to the enclosed claim amendments. Applicants submit that the claim amendments address the ambiguous antecedent basis that was referenced by the Examiner in the final Office Action.

Applicants also note that the Examiner indicates in the final Office Action that claim 16 is rejected due to ambiguous and insufficient antecedent basis. Upon reviewing this rejection, it is Applicants' belief that the rejection of claim 16 is a typographical error resulting from the claims being renumbered (claim 17 was renumbered as claim 16 then renumbered to claim 17 per Applicants' request) because the referenced terms do not all appear in claim 16. In any event, Applicants assert that claim 16 is in acceptable form.

Claim Rejections – 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1, 3-6, 10, 11, and 14-16 are rejected as being anticipated by Akimoto (US 5,803,932). Upon careful consideration of the rejections, Applicants request that they be withdrawn.

Akimoto fails to inherently or explicitly disclose each and every feature of the claimed invention. Claim 1 details that the alignment mechanism is adapted to align the substrate to a predetermined direction by causing the substrate to rotate. Furthermore, the buffer mechanism is adapted to temporarily hold and pass the substrate to the alignment mechanism in such a manner that a center of the substrate is located on a rotational axis of the alignment mechanism.

The Examiner asserts in the Office Action that Akimoto clearly teaches an alignment mechanism 42 for aligning the substrate conveyed by the conveying mechanism to a predetermined direction by causing the substrate to rotate.

Applicants dispute this assertion based upon a review of Akimoto. Akimoto discloses a convey mechanism 42 (asserted to be an alignment mechanism in the Office Action) comprising a base 43 and a holder 44. The base 43 can move up and down and can rotate. The holder 44 is mounted on the base 43 and can be moved back and forth. See column 5 lines 45-50 in Akimoto.

Akimoto fails to inherently or explicitly disclose an alignment mechanism for aligning the substrate to a predetermined direction by causing the substrate to rotate (i.e. aligning the substrate). Although Akimoto discloses a convey mechanism 42 comprising a base 43 that can rotate, Akimoto fails to disclose or suggest that the convey mechanism

42 can serve as an alignment mechanism that can align the substrate to a predetermined location, such as a predetermined location defined by a notch.

Applicants note the Examiner's arguments that centering the substrate is the same as aligning the substrate. However, Applicants wish to clarify that centering the substrate is not the same as aligning the substrate. In accordance with the claimed invention, alignment of the substrate requires a particular rotation of the substrate to a predetermined location. Whereas, centering of a substrate results in the center of the substrate being located on a rotational axis of the alignment mechanism.

It is evident from the above comments that Akimoto fails to disclose the claimed alignment processing mechanism that rotates the substrate to a predetermined location.

Applicants also submit that Akimoto fails to disclose that the substrate is transferred from the buffer mechanism to the alignment mechanism so that the center of the substrate is located on the rotational axis of the alignment mechanism. The centering of the substrate disclosed in Akimoto is achieved by moving the wafer against the edges 46 and the positioning members 47. This is achieved when the wafer is moved to its rearmost position by the holder 44, which moves back and forth. See column 5 lines 45-57 in Akimoto.

In Akimoto, the intermediate table 41A never passes the temporarily held substrate to the conveying mechanism 42 in such a manner that the center of the substrate is located on the rotational axis of the base 43. The holder 44 receives the substrate at a forth-moved state based upon the description of column 5 lines 38-53 in Akimoto. The centering is then achieved after the holder moves to its rearmost position.

Due to the foregoing, Applicants submit that independent claim 1 and dependant claims 3-6 are not anticipated by Akimoto.

Likewise, independent claim 10 and dependant claims 11, and 14-16 are not anticipate by Akimoto. Claim 10 recites the aforementioned features of claim 1 that are not disclosed by the Akimoto.

Claim Rejections-35 U.S.C § 103

Claims 7-9, 12, and 13 are rejected as obvious in light of Akimoto in further view of Somekh (US 5,643,366). Applicants respectfully traverse these rejections.

As discussed above, independent claims 1 and 10 are not believed to be anticipated by Akimoto. Furthermore, Applicants submit that the Examiner has not established that these claims are *prima facie* obvious.

As such, Akimoto and Somekh fail to disclose all of the features of claims 7-9 because these claims depend from claim 1. Likewise, claims 12 and 13 would also not be considered obvious in light of the cited patents due to claim 10 not being obvious or anticipated based upon Akimoto. Therefore, these rejections should be withdrawn.

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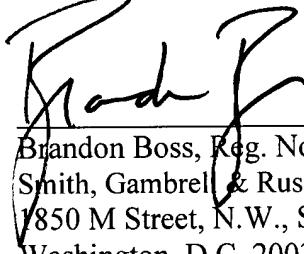
Claim 17 is rejected as obvious in light of Akimoto in combination of Ozawa (US 5,474,410). As discussed above, Applicants assert that Akimoto fails to disclose all of the features of independent claim 10. Therefore, dependant claim 17 would also not be obvious and the rejection should be withdrawn.

CONCLUSION

Applicants respectfully assert that this response obviates the rejections detailed in the Office Action and that the application should be allowed.

If any additional fees are due in connection with the filing of this response, such as fees under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17, please charge the fees to Deposit Account No. 02-4300. Any overpayment can be credited to Deposit Account No. 02-4300.

Respectfully submitted,



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